

Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
House Education and the Workforce Committee Hearing
Child Nutrition Assistance: Are Federal Rules and Regulations Serving the
Best Interests of Schools and Families?
June 16, 2015, 10:00 a.m.
Rayburn 2175

Good morning and thank you, Chairman Kline, for holding this hearing. Today we will discuss the implementation of the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act as well as policy ideas for the upcoming reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. I would like to thank the Agriculture Secretary, the Honorable Tom Vilsack, for being with us today to discuss this important issue.

More than 60 years ago, through enactment of the first federal child nutrition program -- the National School Lunch Act of 1946 -- Congress recognized that feeding hungry children was not just a moral imperative but also an imperative for the health and security of our nation.

In 1946, the 79th Congress passed the National School Lunch Act “as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of food and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation and expansion of nonprofit school lunch programs.”

Today, we are faced with yet another crisis that impacts our nation’s national security—our children are now too obese to enlist in our nation’s military.

One-third of children in this country are obese or overweight and childhood obesity has tripled in the past 30 years. According to a report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N., our nation has the second highest obesity rate in the world, and obesity-related illnesses are costing a shocking \$190.2 billion per year. This weakens our economy and increases budget deficits.

While all segments of the population are affected, food insecure and low-income families are especially vulnerable to obesity and other chronic diseases due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty. Unfortunately, the poorest amongst us have the least access to healthy foods, many times without full-service grocery stores and farmers’ markets in their communities.

In my home state of Virginia, First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe has been focusing not only on ending childhood hunger, but also on improving access to Virginia's fresh and locally grown agricultural commodities. This dual goal helps children, supports our farmers and strengthens our local economies.

The reality is that the negative health effects associated with poor nutrition are preventable. We still have a long way to go, but there have been positive signs of progress through

implementation of child nutrition programs. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has consistently proven to be a cost-effective investment that improves the nutrition and health of low-income families. The program has led to healthier infants, more nutritious diets and better health care for children, and subsequently to higher academic achievement for students.

For some children, their only access to nutritious meals is at school, through the school meal programs, and we know that children and teens can consume up to half of their total daily calories at school. During the average school day in 2011, more than 31 million children ate school lunch, and 12.5 million ate school breakfast. It is up to us to ensure that our children are fed nutritious meals that can support them as they learn and grow.

For the first time in over 30 years, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act has given us the opportunity to make reforms that improve the nutrition and hunger safety net for millions of children. Studies have shown that students are now eating more fruits and vegetables, and in many schools there has been widespread acceptance of the new nutrition standards.

As we address the implementation of this law, it is important to remember that the guidelines are evidence-based; they are not based on politics or corporate bottom-lines. They reflect the healthy eating habits most of us in this room try to follow each day.

While there are a small number of schools still working to meet compliance with new standards, the vast majority of school districts—95 percent—are successfully implementing the new healthy meals standards. These programs are powerful tools in providing greater economic opportunities for at-risk youth, and helping them break free of the tragic cycle of poverty. It is critical that we work with schools to ensure they have the support they need to be successful. I look forward to hearing more about the USDA's new technical assistance initiative, Team Up for Success, and how the unique challenges of schools are being met.

Today we will have an opportunity to discuss the scope and impact of the new school meals and WIC programs. I'm hopeful that we will also discuss ways to improve and strengthen them. This year's reauthorization of the child nutrition programs should build on the progress we've made over the last five years.

Thank you and I yield back.